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Adult attachment, life experiences, right-wing authoritarianism, and social dominance orientation

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(Article begins on next page)

Adult attachment styles, life experiences, right-wing authoritarianism, and social dominance orientation

RUNNING HEAD: Predicting RWA and SDO

Conteggio dei caratteri: 48893

Riassunto

In un campione di 427 studenti universitari italiani abbiamo analizzato le relazioni fra attaccamento in età adulta da un lato e autoritarismo di destra (RWA) e orientamento alla dominanza sociale (SDO) dall'altro, attraverso la mediazione delle esperienze di vita. Un modello di equazioni strutturali con variabili latenti ha evidenziato che lo stile evitante e quello ambivalente-fusionale hanno promosso l'RWA e lo SDO attraverso la mediazione della valutazione delle esperienze di vita, mentre lo stile ambivalente-fusionale lo ha fatto attraverso la mediazione della scarsa propensione a fare una ricca esperienza di vita.

Conteggio delle parole del riassunto: 91

Parole chiave: Autoritarismo di destra, Orientamento alla dominanza sociale, Attaccamento, Esperienze di vita

Abstract

In a sample composed of 427 Italian undergraduates we analyzed the relations between adult attachment style on the one hand and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO) on the other hand, through the mediation of life experiences. A structural equations model with latent variables showed that the avoidant and the ambivalent-merger attachment styles positively influenced RWA and SDO through the mediation of the evaluation of the experiences one has had, while the ambivalent-worry style did so via the mediation of a low inclination to richly experiencing life.

Key words: Right-wing authoritarianism, Social dominance orientation, Attachment, Life experiences

Over the last few decades, social psychologists showed renewed interest in authoritarianism. This is due, on the one hand, to the popularity of extreme right-wing parties and the spread of racist attitudes in many Western countries (Ignazi, 2003). On the other hand, after some years of theoretical and methodological weakness, two strong approaches are now available, one by Altemeyer (1981, 1988, 1996) on right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), and one by Pratto, Sidanius, and colleagues (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) on social dominance orientation (SDO). As a matter of fact, SDO was *not* originally conceived as a form of authoritarianism: Indeed, it was conceived as the psychosocial component of a broader social dominance theory, developed to explain intergroup conflicts and the oppression, discrimination, brutality, and tyranny characterizing many human societies. However, according to Altemeyer (1998), since SDO expresses a trend to submit other groups to one's in-group, it can be considered "the other authoritarian personality" (Altemeyer, 1998), and conceived as *leaders authoritarianism*.

RWA is defined as the covariation of three attitudinal clusters: (a) *Authoritarian submission*—a high degree of submission to the authorities, perceived to be legitimated in the society in which one lives; (b) *Authoritarian aggression*—a general aggressiveness, directed against various people perceived to be negatively sanctioned by established authorities; and (c) *Conventionalism*—a high degree of adherence to the social conventions, perceived to be endorsed by society and its established authorities (Altemeyer, 1996). RWA positively correlates with prejudice, support of death penalty, punitive attitudes towards unconventional persons, religiousness, approval of the injustice perpetrated by governing authorities, and obedience in Milgram-style experiments (Altemeyer, 1981, 1988, 1996). As RWA expresses a psychosocial trend to submit to antidemocratic authorities, it can be conceived as *followers authoritarianism*.

According to Altemeyer (1988), the best explanation of RWA origins stems from a social learning approach. He detected two variables as main RWA predictors: fear of the world and

self-righteousness. Such variables would originate in adolescence, when people who will later become authoritarian did not have the opportunity for richly and directly experiencing life, because of self-selection, self-denial, and self-exclusion. Thus, they could not get in touch with members of out-groups, deviants, or “immoral” people, and consequently change their RWA-related attitudes. On the contrary, future non-authoritarian people did come into contact with different people, values, and behaviors, and directly realized that, as a whole, they do not pose a threat to social order. McFarland, Ageyev, and Abalakina (1993) confirmed the close relation between life experiences and RWA in two samples, one from the USA and one from Russia. Extrapolating from Altemeyer’s (1988) Experiences scale the number of experiences one has had and their evaluation, they found in both samples a negative correlation between RWA and the number of experiences and a positive correlation between RWA and an authoritarian evaluation of the experiences one has had.

As a matter of fact, Altemeyer (1988) himself maintains that life experiences could not be the ultimate cause of RWA: “experiences may correlate with authoritarian attitudes, but only because ... other factors have predisposed us to experience experiences in expected ways” (p. 86). He states that these factors are of psychosocial nature: According to him, the most important ones are the teachings coming from parents, other authorities, friends, and the mass media. However, Hopf (1993), Meloen (1993), Samelson (1993), and Smith (1997) believe that more emphasis should be placed on personality dynamics underlying RWA. Moreover, according to Stone (1993), Altemeyer has not demonstrated that the social learning approach he used is superior to the psychoanalytical approach by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford (1950). According to Lippa and Arad (1999), even though unfashionable, psychodynamic conceptions of authoritarianism may be worth re-examining. Moreover, Krauss (2002) showed that, at least in Romania, RWA develops during childhood, not adolescence.

Pratto et al. (1994) define SDO as “the extent to which one desires that one’s in-group dominate and be superior to out-groups” (p. 742). SDO is conceived as a general approach toward relations

among social groups (defined by sex, race, social class, nationality, religion, skin color, and so on) onto which different cultures found social stratification. SDO is the psychosocial basis for the development of, and support for, hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myths, which are attitudes, values, beliefs, stereotypes, and ideologies that provide moral and intellectual justification for practices that allocate asymmetrically social values among groups. SDO strongly correlates with a number of social attitudes, ideological beliefs, and behaviors that foster inequality in inter-group relations. Among them are prejudice, racism, sexism, nationalism, just world beliefs, and political conservatism (Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

As concerns SDO origins, Sidanius and Pratto (1999) identify both cultural and biological factors. According to them, there are four chief groups of SDO predictors: (a) membership of, and identification with, dominant groups on the basis of arbitrary stratification systems (those based on membership to a clan, ethnic group, nationality, race, caste, social class, religion, region, and so on); (b) social factors such as educational status, religious faith, and the set of natural and social events (such as natural disasters and wars) that occurred during childhood; (c) some not specified inborn temperamental and personality traits; (d) gender: Men tend to be more social dominance oriented than women, in that they tend to play more favorable social roles. However, Sidanius and Pratto concluded that “while it is possible that SDO is also related to temperamental-emotional styles, attachment experiences, and certain kinds of socialization, we have yet to examine these processes in any detail” (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 308). However, more recently SDO was shown to correlate negatively with empathy for others, and to correlate positively with thoughtmindedness (e.g., Duckitt, Wagner, du Plessis, & Birum, 2002; Ekehammar, Akrami, Gylje, & Zakrisson, 2004).

Over the last few years, researchers have tried to connect the personality sphere with RWA and SDO. Some of them operationalized personality using the Big Five approach (McCrae & Costa, 1985). Obtained results have been somewhat inconsistent (Altemeyer, 1996; Ekehammar et al., 2004; Heaven

& Bucci, 2001; Peterson, Smirles, & Wentworth, 1997; Riemann, Grubich, Hempel, Mergel, & Richter, 1993; Trapnell, 1994). However, a recent meta-analysis performed by Sibley and Duckitt (2008) showed that RWA negatively correlates with Openness to Experience, and positively correlates with Conscientiousness. In addition, Heaven and Bucci (2001) and Pratto et al. (1994) found a negative correlation between SDO, Openness to Experience, and Agreeableness. A negative relation between Agreeableness and SDO was also found by Ekehammar et al. (2004).

Based on another personality approach, links between attachment (Bowlby, 1969), RWA and SDO can be hypothesized. According to the attachment theory, children, depending on the caregiver's sensitivity, availability, consistency and predictability, develop different *styles of attachment*, aimed to maximize, as far as possible, emotional security and protection against stress (Rutter & O'Connor, 1999). The main taxonomy of the attachment styles in childhood was built by Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978), who distinguished one secure pattern of attachment and two insecure patterns, labelled *anxious-ambivalent* and *avoidant*.

Recent studies have extended conceptions on childhood attachment to adolescence and adulthood, on the bases of Bowlby's (1973) pioneering consideration that, reaching adolescence, people develop interactional generalized attachment styles from childhood patterns of interaction with the attachment figures. On the whole, research on children and adults showed that secure people tend to have fundamental internal resources to cope with adversities, to be characterized by a personality structure that promotes self-esteem, emotional regulation, the development of positive models of the self and the others, and the commitment to the material and symbolic exploration of their social environment. As adults, they tend to have more constructive attitudes toward existence than insecure people do. On the contrary, insecure people tend to find it harder to tackle the problems they encounter during their personal and social lives, and to develop defensive strategies mediating between the need for security and the incapability or impossibility of attaining it. Insecure attachment is considered a risk

factor that weakens the ability to cope with stressful situations: Insecure people are characterized by relational instability, inadequate management of negative emotions, and a strong sense of ineffectiveness (Bowlby, 1973). In comparison with secure people, they tend to be more anxious and hostile (Kobak & Sceery, 1988), to hold a less positive view of the social world and of human nature in general (Collins & Read, 1990), and to perceive social transactions as more serious psychological threats (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998).

Other authors tried to link adult attachment styles to some socially relevant attitudes and behaviors. Insecure vs. secure people tend: (a) to be more violent within the couple (Holtzworth-Munroe, Stuart, & Hutchinson, 1997); (b) to behave more antisocially during adolescence (Arbona & Power, 2003); (c) to be less inclined to moral reasoning (Van IJzendoorn, 1997); and (d) to represent others in greater negative terms and to be less trustful in them (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins, 1996). Thus, it is far from surprising that social psychologists tried to use the attachment theory as a theoretic-methodological framework to study the relationships between the security of the persons and that of the communities in which they live and which they contribute to build (Roccatò & Russo, 2012).

The fundamental postulate of such works is that children and adults share the same pressing attachment needs and that in moments of difficulty the same processes leading to the development of an insecure attachment style in childhood can be seen working at social level (Holmes, 1993). As a consequence, the political psychology of attachment postulates that the emotive deprivation of children can be conceived as social pathology having social consequences distorting and degrading community life (Miller, 1980). Indeed, research showed that insecure people (in comparison with secure people) tend: (a) to perceive the world as a more threatening place and themselves as less able to efficiently face relational and social events and to use constructive strategies of coping (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998, 2000); (b) to perceive outgroups more negatively (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001); and (c) to show

greater uneasiness and fear in relationships with members of the outgroups and with people who are not well known (Moss, Grosselin, Parent, Rousseau, & Dumont, 1997).

Somewhat consistent with this, Hopf (1993) postulated that the relations occurring in the first few months of life are the key variables in the development of authoritarianism. Furthermore, according to Marris (1991, 1996) attachment theory can be used to explain why some people develop a strong tendency to submit to authority and/or to subject other people and other groups as a means to handle the insecurity deriving from a weak self-concept and a highly negative self-image. In Marris' approach, both authoritarianism and insecure attachment tend to be promoted by economic, political, institutional crises, and by powerlessness. Powerless people tend to feel personally insecure and to rear insecurely-attached children, promoting what Bowlby (1953) defined the *deprivation cycle*. Moreover, powerless people are inclined to fight or flight and to develop authoritarian attitudes and behaviors (Altemeyer, 1981, 1988, 1996; Doty, Peterson, & Winter, 1991; Fromm, 1941; Rickert, 1998; Sales, 1973; Scheepers, Felling, & Peters, 1992).

Based on Marris' (1991) approach, it sounds reasonable to postulate insecure individuals to share some important psychological characteristics with right-wing authoritarians and social dominators. On the one hand, right-wing authoritarians and insecure people share the tendency to perceive the world as dangerous, meaningless, threatening, and hostile, and to believe that their psychological survival depends on order production or restoration. On the other hand, both SDO and the insecure attachment styles can be conceived as defensive distortions originated by the attempt to give meaning and predictability to one's personal and social world. Since the power to control uncertainty is unequally distributed at the social level, the security obtained by relatively powerful people may be considered a variant of the insecure attachment styles, because both inhibit the creative development of persons and societies (see also De Zulueta, 1993).

Even if he did not mention the attachment theory at all, Duckitt (2001) developed a dual process model which is somewhat consistent with Bowlby's theory. Indeed, according to Duckitt, future right-wing authoritarians have been subject to rigid and punitive child-rearing practices, developing, as adults, the personality trait of social conformity, and a general view of the world as a dangerous and threatening place. Thus, they may be conceived as sharing important psychological characteristics with ambivalently attached people. On the other hand, future social dominators have been raised by unaffectionate parents, developing, as adults, the personality trait of toughmindedness, and the tendency to represent the world as a competitive jungle. Thus, they may be conceived as sharing important psychological characteristics with avoidants.

Weber and Federico (2007) tried to empirically test such hypotheses, finding weak positive correlations between anxiety and both RWA and SDO, a weak positive correlation between avoidance and SDO, and a weak negative correlation between avoidance and RWA. Moreover, they found strong indirect links between anxiety and RWA (via the mediation of the representation of the world as a dangerous and threatening place), and between avoidance and SDO (via the mediation of the representation of the world as a competitive jungle). More recently, Roccato (2008) detected a positive direct link between avoidance and SDO, and an unexpected indirect, positive link between security and RWA, via the mediation of religiosity.

However, Weber and Federico's and Roccato's research did not directly test the core of Altemeyer's (1988) theory, as they did not use life experiences in the models they built to predict authoritarianism. Thus, we still do not know if life experiences should be substituted by attachment, or if an integrated model, in which the attachment style influences authoritarianism via the mediation of life experiences, may hold. We performed this research trying to overcome this problem.

Goals and hypotheses

We connected attachment, life experiences, RWA, and SDO. We decided to build a model predicting RWA, since a vast literature exists on RWA origins, but not on SDO origins. Then, like previously done by Roccato (2008), we used the model to predict SDO also, in order to study commonalities and differences in the psychological roots of the two constructs.

Generally speaking, since “adults with different attachment styles ... explain and interpret events in ways consistent with their beliefs and expectations about themselves and others” (Collins, 1996, p. 826), consistently with the literatures on attachment (Mikulincer & Arad, 1999; Rholes, Simpson, Campbell, & Grich, 2001; Sumer & Knight, 2001; Westmaas & Cohen Silver, 2001) and on authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1988; McFarland et al., 1993), we hypothesized that the relation between attachment and RWA should be mediated by life experiences. In detail, we developed three groups of hypotheses.

1. The insecurity of the attachment should negatively influence one’s inclination to richly experiencing life and the tendency to evaluate his/her experiences in an authoritarian manner. The contrary was hypothesized to be true of the secure style. Based on the somewhat inconsistent results of previous research (Roccato, 2008; Weber & Federico, 2007), we preferred *not* to develop separate hypotheses for the ambivalent and the avoidant styles.

2. The inclination to have a large number of experiences should be negatively linked with RWA, and the inclination to evaluate one’s experiences in an authoritarian manner should be positively linked with RWA.

3. The indirect effect exerted by attachment on RWA, via the mediation of the experiential variables, should be significant.

Method

Participants

Four hundred and twenty-seven undergraduate students at the University of Torino participated in our study (158 men, 269 women, mean age = 23.22, $SD = 3.75$).

Procedure

Participants were recruited during lessons. Their participation was voluntary and anonymous. They filled out a structured 77-item questionnaire, presented as part of “a research performed by the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Torino to find out what people think of some personal and social issues”. Participants completed the questionnaire in about 30 minutes, and were then debriefed.

Measures

For the purposes of our research, we used existing scales, measuring RWA, SDO, life experiences, and attachment styles. In order to simplify participants’ answering task, we adopted a 5-category format for each scale. With an exception, we present them in the order they had in the questionnaire. The exception concerns RWA and SDO, which items have been randomly mixed.

Life experiences were assessed by an *ad hoc* Italian translation of Altemeyer’s (1988) Experiences scale. The scale is composed of 24 items, each describing an experience that the interviewee may have had, and that could plausibly induce RWA. For instance, “It has been my experience that physical punishment is an effective way to make people behave” and “My own experience with pornographic material indicates it is harmless and should *not* be censored”. For each item, participants were asked to select “0” in case they did not have the corresponding personal experience. Otherwise, they had to rate their experience using 4 categories, ranging from – 2 (“The statement is very untrue of my experience”) to + 2 (“The statement is very true of my experience”). The reliability of the scale was satisfactory, $\alpha = .81$.

Like previously done by Altemeyer (1988) and by McFarland et al. (1993), we coded each item of the Experiences scale in authoritarian direction. For instance, for items like “It has been my experience that physical punishment is an effective way to make people behave” scores were ordered

from 2 (“This statement is very true of my experiences”) to -2 (“This statement is very untrue of my experiences”). The coding was reversed for items like “My own experience with pornographic material indicates it is harmless and should *not* be censored”. Like McFarland et al. (1993), we computed two synthetic experience scores from the answers to the Experiences scales: (a) a variable expressing the inclination to richly experiencing life, modeled as latent variable measured by three item parcels¹ accounting for participants’ number of life experiences (P₁NUM, P₂NUM, and P₃NUM in Figure 1), and (b) a variable expressing the mean evaluation of the experiences one has had, modeled as latent variable measured by three item parcels (P₁EVA, P₂EVA, and P₃EVA in Figure 1).

SDO was assessed by Di Stefano and Roccato’s (2005) balanced Italian adaptation of the SDO₆ scale (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The reliability of the scale was satisfactory, $\alpha = .91$. Using structural equations models, we modeled SDO as a latent variable, measured by three item parcels (P₁SDO, P₂SDO, and P₃SDO in Figure 1).

RWA was assessed using Giampaglia and Roccato’s (2002) 14-items balanced Italian adaptation of the RWA scale (Altemeyer, 1998). The reliability of the scale was satisfactory, $\alpha = .81$. Using structural equations models, we modeled RWA as a latent variable, measured by three item parcels (P₁RWA, P₂RWA, and P₃RWA in Figure 1).

The attachment styles were assessed using Roccato and Tartaglia’s (2003) Italian adaptation of Carver’s (1997) Measure of Attachment Qualities (MAQ). In its original version, the MAQ is composed of 14 four-category Likert items such as “I get uncomfortable when someone wants to be very close” and “I find others often are reluctant to get as close as I would like”. Consistent with Roccato and Tartaglia (2003), exploratory factor analysis showed the 9 item which compose its Italian adaptation to respectively measure the ambivalent-worry style (items 3 and 8, $M = -.58$, $SD = 2.89$, $\alpha = .90$, explained variance = 32.31%), the secure style (items 6, 7 and 9, $M = 2.54$, $SD = 2.53$, $\alpha = .64$, explained variance = 28.28%), the avoidant style (items 4 and 5, $M = -1.58$, $SD = 2.22$, $\alpha = .77$,

explained variance = 6.47%), and the ambivalent-merger style (items 1 and 2, $M = -.38$, $SD = 2.56$, $\alpha = .77$, explained variance = 8.66%). Like in previous research (Carver, 1997; Roccato & Tartaglia, 2003), the two ambivalent styles showed a positive correlation, while the secure and the avoidant styles were negatively correlated (see Table 1). As three out of four of the MAQ factors were measured by two items only, we could not model them as latent variables without adding more constraints to the model. Thus, we computed a summated score for each style of attachment.

Data Analysis

After analyzing the Pearson correlation between the four attachment styles on the one hand and RWA and SDO on the other hand, using Amos (method of estimation: ML) we tested a structural equations model using the attachment styles to predict the inclination richly experiencing life and the experiences evaluation, and the experiential variables to predict RWA and SDO. We estimated the indirect effects using bootstrapping estimation (5000 bootstrap samples).

Results

Table 1 shows that the avoidant attachment style positively correlated with both RWA and SDO. Moreover, SDO negatively correlated with the secure attachment style. Figure 1 shows our model predicting RWA and SDO. As the Secure attachment style did not influence RWA and SDO, neither directly nor indirectly, we excluded it from our model, which explained a very high percentage of the variance of RWA, $Adj. R^2 = .84$, and of SDO, $Adj. R^2 = .55$. Our hypotheses were substantially verified. The ambivalent-worry attachment style positively influenced RWA and SDO, via the mediation of the tendency to poorly experiencing life, indirect effects = .10, $p < .05$ and .08, $p < .05$ respectively. The avoidant and the ambivalent-merger attachment styles fostered RWA and SDO via the mediation of experiences evaluation, indirect effects = .14, $p < .01$ and .11, $p < .01$ respectively. Our model showed a satisfactory fit, $\chi^2(97) = .210.169$, $p = .000$, $TLI = .956$, $CFI = .965$, $RMSEA = .052$ (90% CI = .043, .062).²

Discussion

Generally speaking, this research confirmed Weber and Federico's (2007) and Roccato's (2008) results, in that it showed significant links between attachment, RWA, and SDO. In detail, we showed that Altemeyer's (1988; see also McFarland et al., 1993) social learning approach considering RWA as primarily based on a rich and non-interpreted in an authoritarian manner life experience may be integrated—at least in part—using attachment as predictor of life experience. We also showed that attachment and life experiences can be fruitfully used to predict SDO. Indeed, the avoidant and the ambivalent-merger attachment styles positively influenced both RWA and SDO, via the mediation of experiencing life in an authoritarian manner; moreover, the ambivalent-worry attachment style positively influenced RWA and SDO via the mediation of the inclination to poorly experiencing life. Thus, significant, indirect links between personality, RWA, and SDO were detected. As in previous research, the influence indirectly exerted on RWA and SDO by attachment was weak. However, it was systematically significant.

As concerns the prediction of RWA, our model should be considered a development of Altemeyer's perspective, since it integrated personality and social-psychological variables to explain RWA. As a matter of fact, Altemeyer's experiential variables *did* add a lot of explicative power to Weber and Federico's (2007) and to Roccato's (2008) models. This result suggested the importance of including life experiences in a prediction model of RWA.

More importantly, significant links between attachment, life experiences, and SDO were detected, and a big share of the SDO variance was explained. It could even be argued that the percentage of the RWA and of the SDO variances we could explain was so high to be suspect, and that there was conceptual redundancy between the RWA and the SDO items and the experiences items. However, this objection—which in fact may be expressed to every research based on these scales—only applies if our participants misinterpreted the instructions of the Experiences scale, reporting their opinion on the

topics presented in the items, and not the outcome of their experiences. When preparing our questionnaire, we were aware of such a danger. Thus, like Altemeyer (1988), in the presentation of the questionnaire we repeatedly warned our participants to exclusively answer the experiences items thinking to their experiences and not to their opinions. In the debriefing a group of 20 participants was asked to tell the researcher the criteria they used in answering the Experiences scale. Nobody reported having made reference to his/her opinion. Moreover, parallel analyses performed after excluding the RWA and the Experiences items showing empirical overlap led to results analogous to those we have presented. Thus, we have no evidence that our participants incorrectly answered the Experiences scale. As a consequence, the percentage of RWA and SDO variances our model explained becomes even more remarkable, given the semantic independence between the *explanans* (our independent variables: attachment styles and life experiences) and the *explanandum* (our dependent variables: RWA and SDO). This plausibly means that our study didn't violate Von Wright's (1971) pre-condition of predictive models.

Since Altemeyer's (1998) seminal article, authors studying authoritarianism showed a number of factors differentiating RWA and SDO. According to Lippa and Arad (1999), RWA and SDO are linked to different psychological variables (RWA to defensiveness and maladjustment, SDO to disagreeableness and coldness). Moreover, Altemeyer (1998) and Duriez and Van Hiel (2002) affirmed that, apart from prejudice, RWA and SDO do not share any common element. Finally, according to Duckitt (2001) RWA and SDO stem from different personality structures (RWA from social conformism, SDO from thoughtminedness) and different visions of the world (perceived as threatening and dangerous by right-wing authoritarians and as a competitive jungle by social dominators). In spite of such differences, in countries—like Italy—characterized by strong ideological contrast RWA and SDO systematically show strong correlations. For instance, Roccato and Ricolfi (2005) reported correlations which reached $r = .60$. The very strong correlation we have found in this study was

consistent with those in the literature. However, our participants have been presented a mix of RWA and SDO items, instead of separate scales. Thus, a method factor could have inflated the correlation between the constructs. A replication of this study, performed presenting the RWA and the SDO items separately would be interesting. Another limitation of this study concerns its cross-sectional, self-report nature. Indeed, given that our theoretical model was a developmental model, new research performed using longitudinal approaches, and a data collection process based on more ecologically valid methods than self-reports would be germane.

However, even with this *caveats*, we should admit that in our data the similarity of the patterns of relations between attachment and life experiences on the one hand and RWA and SDO on the other hand were impressive: Our results showed that RWA and SDO have a lot in common in terms of attachment and evaluation of life experiences, and that it is possible to develop a personality and social psychology model predicting RWA and SDO explaining a very remarkable percentage of RWA and SDO variances using just few common independent variables. Moreover, a recent, ground-breaking article by Van Hiel and DeClerq (2009) proposed a new conception of RWA. According to these authors, this construct should be considered as “good for the self”, in that it functions as an efficient mechanism people may use to cope with threat and stress when feeling particularly vulnerable. Our results, showing indirect links between attachment insecurity and RWA, via the mediation of interpreting one’s experiences in an authoritarian manner, may be considered as an indirect confirmation of such a conception. More importantly, showing the same links when SDO was concerned, they suggested another relevant commonality between these two constructs. Thus, we believe that more work on the similarities and differences between RWA and SDO is needed.

In conclusion, our data showed that studies on authoritarianism could greatly benefit from personality analysis, at least for two reasons. On the one hand, the personality sphere may give studies on authoritarianism more theoretical power, especially if personality is used in connection with the

social-psychological sphere represented by life experiences. On the other hand, studies on authoritarianism had to give up analyzing personality because of the weak reliability and validity of traditional personality measures. To date, however, many valid and reliable scales are available to investigate personality in quantitative research. Attachment is not the only approach we can use: As a matter of fact, as we have seen, the most used approach is the Big Five. Openness to Experience could play central role, since it negatively correlates with right-wing political ideology (Van Hiel, Kossowska, & Mervielde, 2000), with RWA (Altemeyer, 1996; Butler, 2000; Ekehammar et al., 2004; Heaven & Bucci, 2001; Peterson et al., 1997; Riemann et al., 1993; Trapnell, 1994), and with SDO (Ekehammar et al., 2004; Heaven & Bucci, 2001; Pratto et al., 1994). Moreover, recent research showed complex direct, indirect, and interactive links between Big Five, perceiving the world as a threatening place, and RWA (Dallago & Roccato, 2010; Dallago, Mirisola, & Roccato, 2011, 2012). Further research aimed at integrating the Big Five-perceived threat-authoritarianism and the attachment-life experiences-authoritarianism models, helping understanding the complex links between personality, perception of the social world, and authoritarianism will be interesting.

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Footnotes

1. In this and in the following scales the combinations of items used to compute the parcels have been randomly chosen.

2. As suggested by an anonymous reviewer, based on Van Hiel, Cornelis, and Roets (2007) we performed an exploratory factor analysis on the Experiences scale and the RWA scale items, in order to exclude from the model the “problematic” items, i.e. those loading on the “wrong” factor. A parallel model in which we modelled RWA and life experiences without the 3 RWA and the 7 experiences “problematic” items led to results (available upon request) substantially analogous to those we published.

Table 1.

Correlations among Attachment, Life Experiences, RWA, and SDO

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Ambivalent-worry	1							
2. Secure	-.01	1						
3. Avoidant	-.03	-.50***	1					
4. Ambivalent-merger	.68***	-.06	.01	1				
5. Inclination to life experiences	-.05	.12*	-.06	-.12*	1			
6. Experiences evaluation	-.05	-.12*	.08	.03	-.10*	1		
7. RWA	-.09	-.09	.18***	-.02	-.02	.74***	1	
8. SDO	-.00	-.19***	.11*	.07	-.03	.63***	.63***	1

Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Adult attachment, life experiences, right-wing authoritarianism, and social dominance orientation (standardized coefficients displayed)

Figure 1.

